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SUBJECT: MERKEL CLAIMS POLITICAL CENTER FOR CDU

REF: BERLIN 1977

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER-COUNSELOR JEFFREY RATHKE FOR REASONS
1.4(B) AND (D)

11. (C) Summary: German Chancellor Angela Merkel's central and ever present role in the Christian Democratic Union's (CDU) December 3-4 convention and the absence of any major internal opposition to her policies or leadership reinforce her position as the undisputed leader of the most U.S.-friendly party in the German political landscape. Merkel delivered a centrist address at the party's Hannover convention and received an 8-minute standing ovation. Her speech also included strong pro-U.S. statements. The CDU passed a new platform, for only the third time in its history, which embodies the party's economic reform orientation, positive posture towards transatlantic relations, and growing confidence as an international player. Both Merkel and the platform received virtually unanimous support from party delegates in a convention devoid of much programmatic debate. Merkel's confident performance and the party's display of unity are likely to improve the CDU's already strong standing, which the party hopes to convert into electoral success in three state elections in Hesse, Lower Saxony, and Hamburg in early 2008 and eventually in the federal elections scheduled for 2009. End summary.

12. (SBU) In her speech, the Chancellor referred to "a close friendship with the country that has supported German freedom and unification like no other, a friendship with the United States of America" that Germany should continue to build upon. The platform elaborated that transatlantic relations have always been and will remain an important foundation for peace, freedom, and prosperity in Germany. In the platform, the CDU expressly thanked the United States for freeing Germany of National Socialism and communism. (Note: In an encouraging display of pro-Americanism, Poloffs saw a handful of delegates from the former East Germany wearing pins of intertwined U.S. and German flags, a sight unseen at any other recent political party convention in Germany. End note.)

Staking Out the Political Center

13. (SBU) The convention was the CDU's kick-off to what promises to be an increasingly intense and partisan state and federal election campaign season. The CDU seeks to claim the political center as its own, in response to the left-leaning Social Democratic Party's (SPD) populist message at its October convention (see refTel) (which advocates rolling back some of the economic reform policies of former Chancellor Schroeder's market-oriented Agenda 2010). The convention's logo was simply, "The Center." and was designed to send an unambiguous message to the German public that the CDU is the only truly centrist party in Germany. The CDU used the convention as an opportunity to distance itself from its governing partner, the SPD, which it claims has been pulled

towards the left by The Left party. Whereas the SPD adopted a new platform that embraces "democratic socialism," Merkel responded that "We never again want socialism." Merkel declared that "We -- and only we -- are the Center." Minister-President of Lower Saxony Christian Wulff, referring to the SPD, added that "Others have lost their way."

¶4. (C) The party's centrist message included the following highlights:

-- On SECURITY: Merkel advocated a "modern" security policy which recognizes that one can no longer separate domestic and foreign policy, since events overseas affect German security at home. She spoke in favor of Interior Minister Schaeuble's proposal for online computer searches and proposed that the German Army be deployed domestically as necessary, under certain conditions and circumstances, for domestic security. (Note: The proposal on domestic use of the German Army is sure to face stiff opposition from other parties, and may not even enjoy consensus support within the CDU. End note.)

-- On CHINA: In response to ongoing SPD criticism of the Chancellor's meeting with the Dalai Lama, Merkel asserted that human rights are one of the bases of German foreign policy.

-- On RUSSIA: A close relationship with the U.S. should not foreclose a strategic partnership with Russia, according to Merkel and the platform. The strategic relationship, however, must be able to withstand criticism, Merkel insisted.

-- On GLOBALIZATION: Merkel claimed that Germany is the "engine of Europe." She sees globalization not only as an obvious matter of fact, but also as an opportunity for

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export-champion Germany, noting that Germany has performed exceptionally well in international markets.

-- On GERMANY'S ROLE IN THE WORLD: According to the party platform, Germany "stands ready to allocate the resources and instruments for its international duties and responsibilities." In pursuit of its goals of freedom and security, Merkel noted that Germany needs partners among the great powers, and cannot "go it alone."

-- On CLIMATE CHANGE: The CDU proposes a climate strategy that favors binding limits for greenhouse gases as well as the development of climate-friendly technologies. Their goal is to limit global warming to 2 degrees centigrade by reducing greenhouse emissions at least 30 percent by 2020 compared to 1990 levels.

-- On EU DEFENSE POLICY: The CDU aims for a common EU foreign and security policy, to include energy security as well. It advocates further development of the European Security and Defense Policy, but underscores that NATO remains the primary security instrument for Germany and Europe.

-- On the UNITED NATIONS: The CDU reiterated its desire for a permanent seat for the EU on the Security Council.

-- On TURKEY: The CDU reiterated support for a "privileged relationship" for Turkey instead of EU membership.

-- On LABOR MARKET REFORMS: Merkel urged the SPD to continue on the path towards market-oriented reform of Germany's labor markets, begun in the Gerhard Schroeder era. Instead of industry-specific minimum wages, the CDU stresses the importance of job creation.

Comment

¶5. (C) The CDU is currently the most popular party in

Germany, polling at about 40% of public support in a field of five major parties. But according to polls, in the current political landscape, it would not be assured of forming a majority coalition with another party if it were to attempt to break free from its marriage of necessity to the SPD. The party hopes that momentum gained from its convention -- putting the highly popular Chancellor front-and-center and displaying its centrist platform -- will parlay into electoral success. Indeed, the CDU hopes to sweep all three state elections in early 2008, thereby giving it the boost it needs to push further ahead of the SPD and place itself in position to form a future coalition with its natural and historical partner, the Free Democratic Party (FDP).

TIMKEN JR